

Challenges Encountered by the Jail Officers in Enforcing the Minimum Health Protocols

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DOI: <http://doi.org/10.46431/MEJAST.2022.5211>

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Article Received: 12 March 2022

Article Accepted: 17 June 2022

Article Published: 28 June 2022



ABSTRACT

Minimum Health Protocols can take the form of social distancing, wearing of face mask and applying proper hygiene to avoid infections and diseases. This study explored the challenges encountered by the jail officers in Misamis Occidental Provincial Reformatory Jail in Capitol Drive, Oroquieta City, Misamis Occidental. The study were participated by 10 jail officers. interview and guide questions were used in gathering the data. The study used the qualitative approach using the phenomenological design. Moustakas' transcendental phenomenology was used in analysis the data to come up with seven meaningful theme; Suspension of visiting privilege, Strenuous implementation of health protocol, Immediate Isolation for COVID-19 Infected, High risk of Covid-19 infection, Affected Duties due to COVID-19 Infection and Quarantines, Acceptance of Being Carriers of COVID-19 Virus, and Adhering to health protocol. Encountering minimum health protocols has its various effects depending on the illnesses they experience such as the Covid-19 virus it has the huge impact to everyone.

Keywords: Challenges, Covid-19, Encounter, Jail officer, Health protocols.

1. Introduction

The Bureau of Jail Management and Penology (BJMP) is one of the pillars of the Criminal Justice System. It was established to address the rising concern about jail administration and penology issues (Patlunag, 2020). Detainees accused before a court who are temporarily held in such prisons while undergoing investigation or awaiting final judgment, as well as those who are serving sentences imposed by the court of three years or less, comprise the majority of its inmates (Vicente 2019, Patlunag 2020, Wallace, Hill, & Rosales, 2020). The commons situation inside the jail are the changing trend in prison population, overcrowding in correctional facilities, adjustments in prison conditions, and an increase in drug-related offenders seem to be just a few of the major contemporary issues addressing correctional administrators as a result of these social, economic, and environmental changes (Kreager & Kruttschnitt, 2018).

In addition to overcrowding, prisons in the Philippines have poor ventilation, limited food supply with low nutritional value, unhygienic conditions, and inaccessible medical care. Mental health issues also arise due to isolation and lack of privacy. It is easy to see how the dire circumstances in Philippine prisons lead to a multitude of health problems for prisoners (Auro et al., 2021; Kumar, & Nayar, 2021). In addition to that Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is an infectious disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus. Most people who fall sick with COVID-19 will experience mild to moderate symptoms and recover without special treatment (Azkur et al., 2020). And because of that the BJMP takes its action to prevent from spreading it to the inmates (Nario-Lopez, 2021).

The COVID-19 virus appears to affect some communities, workplaces and groups more acutely than others (Nishi et al., 2020). Exploring why this is happening is essential to immunize society against further economic and social dislocation in the future, researchers say (Haley, Paucar-Caceres, & Schlindwein, 2021). While the virus itself does not discriminate, certain groups are bearing a disproportionate burden of illness (San Lau et al., 2020). Poverty or unstable work can lead to underlying illnesses or conditions that disadvantage sections of the population (Craig et

al., 2020). The number of infections and deaths is likely even higher than the reported number because jails and prisons are conducting limited testing on incarcerated people. Many facilities would not test incarcerated people who die after showing symptoms of Covid-19 (Urell, 2021).

Due to this situation the BJMP officers authorized to keep the social distancing, strictly wearing of facemask and providing vaccination to all inmates and who goes inside the jail (De Castro, Lopez, Hamoy, Alba, & Gundayao, 2020). Despite limited space and resources, jail personnel and detainees cooperatively addressed the pandemic threat. Using interviews with jail personnel and detainees, and a review of social media postings and official internal reports, we document the varied manifestations of shared governance. Specifically, jail personnel and prisoner leaders cooperated by disseminating information, crafting policies, identifying makeshift quarantine areas, assigning prisoner medical staff, and instituting discipline (Jones & Narag, 2021). We know even less about how the virus is affecting them, though they have the potential to carry the virus both into facilities and back into their communities. It is difficult to assess because many aren't being systemically tested. At the New Bilibid Prison in Muntinlupa City, a vocational training area was transformed into an isolation ward for COVID-19 suspects and patients with mild and moderate symptoms. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) provided beds and other furniture, medical equipment and supplies, and hygiene/ sanitation items for the isolation wards (*International Committee of the Red Cross.*, 2020).

The Bureau of Jail Management and Penology stressed that prisoners cannot be temporarily freed during the pandemic, despite running petitions against the threat of COVID-19 inside jails (CNN Philippines Staff, 2020). The researcher discusses the major responses that have been carried out such as easing the rules on parole grant and executive clemency, providing human consideration to the vulnerable segments, and improving the corrections facilities health management. These responses are expected to decrease the growth of virus infection inside the corrections facilities, protect the condition especially of the vulnerable segments, and ensure the overall safety of the community (Cahapay, 2020).

In the case of the BJMP personnel, Solda revealed that 1,301 Covid-19 cases were recorded since March 2020 but added 1,237 of them have recovered with 58 remaining active cases. The BJMP has recorded 2,416 cases since the beginning of the pandemic but the good news is that 2,216 have recovered and only 115 cases or active cases remain in the facility, BJMP spokesperson, Chief Inspector Xavier Solda said in a radio interview on Friday (Caliwan, 2021). There's no updated data yet on how many prisoners died of COVID-19 in BJMP facilities, but Rappler's investigation in 2020 showed a high number of deaths at BuCor facilities (Buan, 2021). As of this year there are no claim yet of complaints inside in terms of COVID 19 because they are still monitoring the safety hazards to avoid infection to other inmates (Hanan, 2021).

This paper aimed to identify and examine the difficulties experienced of the jail officers in implementing the minimum health protocols inside the jail during the pandemic. This also describes the status of health in the Provincial Jail in the City of Oroquieta, with the purpose of offering specific recommendations for jail policy.

2. Methods

This study is a qualitative research approach. The phenomenological approach was used as method of the undertaking. It is the process of analyzing the data from the participants of the study to obtain the meaningful

themes following the Moustakas' transcendental phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994). This research design is suited to explore the challenges encountered by the Jail officers in enforcing the minimum health protocol inside the jail at Misamis Occidental Provincial Reformatory Jail in the Oroquieta City, Misamis Occidental.

The study was conducted in Misamis Occidental Provincial Reformatory Jail (MOPRJ) at Capitol Drive, Oroquieta City, from the province of Misamis Occidental. Oroquieta City is known as the City of Good Life and also known for its hospitality and peace loving people. The city is also a major agricultural trading center, such as coconut and several 'coconut-processing' factories. Oroquieta is also a leading producer of copra since it became a city.

The study was participated by ten (10) Jail Officers who are assigned in the Misamis Occidental Provincial Reformatory Jail (MOPRJ) in Capitol Dr, Oroquieta City, Misamis Occidental. This participants were purposively identified, and they were chosen to be interview.

The study used the self-made interview guide prepared by the researcher. The interview guide was checked by the adviser and at the same time it was checked and approved by the panel members before administered to the participants. The tool contains questions that obtain the challenges encountered by the Jail officers in enforcing the minimum health protocols inside the jail. The instrument is composed of opening questions to obtains the needed profile of the respondents, the core questions and the closing questions. Further, during the actual conduct of interview, the researcher recorded the conversation for future reference during the data interpretation. Moreover, aside from recording the interview process, the researchers prepared recording sheet to record the important points given by the participants.

Data collection is vital in every research endeavor. Before the actual conduct of the interview with the participants, the researcher asked permission from the Dean of the College of Criminology of the Misamis University allowing the researcher to pursue the study through formal letter. After the approval from the Dean, the researcher also asked permission in the Misamis Occidental Provincial Reformatory Jail in Oroquieta City through formal letter. The researcher set an appointment to the identified participants and proposing schedule of the interview. The researcher informed the participants that the conversation will be recorded and gave them an assurance that all their responses will be kept with utmost confidentiality. Further, the minimum health protocol was observed during the conduct of the interview considering the pandemic.

In the entire process of the study, the welfare of the participants is the priority of the researcher. Privacy and confidentiality was observed at all times, particularly name of the participants and other information unnecessary to the study. The researcher adhere the guidelines set by the Republic Act No. 10173 known as the "Data Privacy Act of 2012". Through these, the researcher can assure the privacy and confidentiality of the qualitative research. The researcher also observe the minimum health protocols during the conduct of interview considering the pandemic.

3. Results and Discussions

This part presented the different themes that were derived from the different responses of the participants of the study during the conduct of the interview. The study explored the challenges encountered by the Jail Officers in enforcing the minimum health protocols using the qualitative research method, and participated by ten (10) randomly selected jail officer.

Themes are derived from the responses of the participant of the study after interviewing by the proponent. The participants' responses were analyzed using the NVivo software to produce an appropriate theme. The study identified seven (7) appropriate themes, which are (1) Suspension of visiting privilege, (2) Strenuous implementation of health protocol, (3) Immediate Isolation for COVID-19 Infected, (4) High risk of Covid-19 infection, (5) Affected Duties due to COVID-19 Infection and Quarantines, (6) Acceptance of Being a Carriers of COVID-19 Virus, and (7) Adhering to health protocol.

3.1. Suspension of visiting privilege

The privileged visit is any interaction or communication between visitors protected by a legal or administrative privilege (Dallaire et al., 2021). The suspension of visiting rights will obstruct the offender's effective reintegration into society by preventing the inmate from maintaining community and family relationships (*Statutes, codes, and regulations*, 2022). However, visitation is a privilege and might be briefly limited for a guilty party or a guest, assuming legal infringement happens or security concerns exist. In addition, appearance may be briefly stopped during unit lockdowns and other genuine occurrences, like escapes or riots. These were revealed in the answers of the participants:

"When the pandemic began, everything changed, and most significantly, we stopped "dalaw" for the PDL's family. For the protection of ourselves and the PDLs, we never allow guests to enter the facility. It was never easy in our nation during the pandemic Covid-19 outbreaks." (P3, 63-66).

"Visitors and families of Person Deprived of Liberty (PDL) in Misamis Occidental Provincial Reformatory Jail (MOPRJ) frequently fight with jail staff and complain as to why they are not allowed to meet or visit their jailed relatives." (P1, 4-7).

The result implied that the Jail Officers had temporarily suspended the visit for a Person Deprived of Liberty (PDL) due to the Coronavirus disease. They implement the suspension of visiting PDLs so that it will prevent the spread of these Covid-19 diseases. However, sometimes they receive complaints from the visitors of the PDL who disagree about the changes. These feelings are usually felt by any Jail Officer who receives negative feedback from the visitors or private individuals. They don't have the choice, though, because they must adhere to the regulations. Because of the situation, they have temporarily suspended inmate face-to-face visits in order to prevent the virus from spreading outside the jail facility or to the general public. They do, however, have the ability to communicate with their loved ones inside the jail via phone or video calls.

3.2. Strenuous implementation of health protocol

Health safety and protocols are a continuing endeavor to identify measures for safe and healthy teaching and learning environment for in-person learning while closely monitoring the situation (World Health Organization, 2021). Implementing health protocols is strictly followed by everyone, like wearing face masks and social distancing (Burton et al., 2021). However, there were numerous challenges like lack of time, rapidly changing guidelines, no traveling scenarios, training and educating the staff in huge numbers, rapidly evolving situation, change management, need for increased vigilance, and language barrier at certain centers, sustaining quality

assurance and motivating the staff in stressful times (Singh, Verma, Banerjee, Singh, & Bhatt, 2021). These were revealed in the answers of the participants:

“It is difficult to maintain a basic health standard while executing our jobs since the jail is usually full, and implementing such social separation in jail is impossible.” (P2, 24-26).

“In performing our duties and responsibilities, the challenges we encounter in enforcing the minimum health standard in the jail are always maintained one-meter distance, cover/ wear facemask all the time” (P7, 141-144).

“The challenges that we encountered in enforcing the minimum health standard in the jail is always wearing a face mask and social distancing” (P9, 214-216).

The result implied that the Jail Officers should always observe the minimum health protocols inside or outside the jail. In addition, they should always wear face masks and implement social distancing. A well-planned strategy, utilizing available resources, teamwork, and continuous monitoring can bring the best outcomes forward. This challenges they encountered was impossible to maintain the social distancing due to not spacious and very crowded inside the jail facility. In addition, wearing face mask all the time is very difficult to them in breathing because of they should not remove or lowered their face mask while they are on duty.

3.3. Immediate Isolation for COVID-19 Infected

Isolation is separating sick persons with infectious diseases from healthy ones (Wilder-Smith & Freedman, 2020). For example, supposed the person has symptoms of Covid-19, immediately tested and isolated until they received the test results (Grassly, Pons-Salort, Parker, White, Ferguson, Ainslie & Xi, 2020). And if they test positive, they will follow the isolation recommendation. Isolation facility were established to reduce the burden of infections brought into the country and to strengthen quarantines (Marahatta, Paudel, & Aryal, 2020). It seeks to manage the airflow in the room such that the quantity of infectious particles in the air is decreased to a level where cross-infection of other persons within a facility is highly unlikely (Shen, Kong, Dong, Birnkrant & Zhang, 2021). These were revealed in the answers of the participants:

“To address when the PDL shows some symptoms of Covid-19 by isolate, covid-19 suspects and required other PDLs to wear mask and face shield.” (P1, 7-8).

“If the PDL shows some symptoms of covid, we take immediate action to recover it, evacuate him/her to the isolation room for the safety of all PDL’s to prevent the spreading of the covid-19.” (P3, 51-53).

“If ever there some PDL’s show some symptom, we automatically isolate them.” (P4, 86).

“When the PDL has a contagious disease, the PDL will immediately isolate or bring to the hospital” (P5, 100-101).

“When the PDL with the contagious disease concerning isolation, hospitalization, and inmates hygiene we address by informing first the jail nurse for their proper medication.” (P7, 145-147).

Five out of ten participants shared experience separating inmates who suffer from Covid-19. However, the participants had something in common, which was taking immediate action to prevent the spread of the virus.

However, it is unclear whether these interventions will be sufficient to prevent major outbreaks. During the pandemic, they encountered that some of their inmates or co-personnel has been infected and tested positive in the Covid-19 virus. Due to that situation, the infected person and the personnel in the facility was undergo isolation including the asymptomatic person they interacted with during those times. Only because they are quarantined and isolated to ensure safety and prevent the spread of disease within the jail or in the public, personnel will be low, and they may be ineffective in guarding and ensuring the safety of inmates.

3.4. High risk of Covid-19 infection

High-risk activities engage or expose people to a high level of danger that might lead to failure, harm, or many risks (SoleimanvandiAzar et al., 2021). Studies have shown that this virus causes worse outcomes and a higher mortality rate in older adults and those with comorbidities such as hypertension, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, chronic respiratory disease, and chronic kidney disease (Shadid et al., 2020). These were revealed in the answers of the participants:

"Given that our employees frequently mix and associate with people who have been deprived of their liberty, we are particularly vulnerable or over the so-called "high risk" level." (P1, 10-12).

"Feeling worried whenever go to work because we are in high risk." (P4, 87-88).

"As jail officers, we must tell them to relax and not to overthink their condition that could increase the risk of mental effects; As Jail officers, we must prioritize our safety so that when someone has shown symptoms or has any disease, they can automatically adjust for the situation." (P6, 112-113; 114-116).

"As jail officers, we cannot avoid being infected in covid-19 while on our duty for other officers are asymptomatic in covid-19." (P7, 143-149).

The result implied that Jail officers were one of the front-liners during this Covid-19 pandemic. Their duties and responsibilities are very high risk if an inmate or Jail officer shows some symptoms of Coronavirus disease and tests positive. The facility will provide an isolation area and treatment for those infected with coronavirus, and the isolated person should follow the quarantine protocols. They encountered this challenge due to their responsibility to secure the infected person in a isolation area will not violate the protocols and not to infect others. Making sure that the 14 days quarantine or isolation will complete and insured the proper treatment. That's why they are high risk in the Covid-19 infections. If an inmate is suspected of having the Covid-19 virus, they are immediately isolated and a swab test or rapid test is performed to determine whether he or she is positive or negative for the virus. If he or she is found to be positive, they take him or her to the hospital right away for treatment.

3.5. Affected Duties due to COVID-19 Infection and Quarantines

COVID-19 has varied effects on different persons. The majority of infected persons will experience mild to moderate symptoms and recover without hospitalization (Islam, Ferdous, Islam, Mosaddek, Potenza, & Pardhan, 2021). However, after being exposed to an infectious disease, the person is quarantined at home or in a quarantine facility to observe whether they become sick (Wilder-Smith & Freedman, 2020). These were revealed in the answers of the participants:

"Many of us have suffered by Covid and have been called home for quarantine. As a result, we are now strictly enforcing social distancing and wearing face masks to avoid covid." (P3, 49-51).

"We Jail Officers are highly vulnerable to Covid-19; thus, we always disinfect before entering our homes; This Covid-19 pandemic has a significant impact on our job, especially when someone is tested positive, because we are without a workforce for some time, and we are currently without staff for 14 days." (P2, 31-32; 35-37).

"As a Jail Guard, it is hard to get infected in Covid-19, and it may affect our duties following the fourteen 14 days quarantine." (P5, 101-102).

The result implied that there would be a negative impact and insufficient force in securing their inmate's security when a Jail Officer has been infected or exposed to the Covid-19. Therefore, they will comply and follow the fourteen (14) days quarantine to avoid spreading the virus. During the pandemic, there are some of their personnel have been infected in the Covid-19 virus inside the jail facility. That is why they have to quarantine in fourteen (14) days because of this situation, it may weaken their force in securing the safe of their inmates.

3.6. Acceptance of Being a Carriers of COVID-19 Virus

Acceptance refers to a person's willingness to accept the truth of a situation, to recognize a process or circumstance without seeking to modify or resist it (Sauers-Ford et al., 2019). People infected with the coronavirus but exhibit little or no signs of the disease are known as silent carriers or spreaders. Consequently, these people continue about their everyday lives, meeting up with friends and family, going to work, and spreading the disease without even realizing it. (Health, 2020; El-Gilany, 2021; Fuchs, 2021). These were revealed in the answers of the participants:

"I always considered myself a virus courier because of it. I always obey the health protocols, and I must restrain myself from going out into the public to avoid carrying or receiving infections." (P8, 184-187).

"I considered myself to this infectious disease because some of my co-personnel were asymptomatic" (P9, 219-220).

"I susceptible myself to consider to have an infection with covid-19 while you are on a tour of duty when the member inside the jail are severe illness." (P10, 241-243).

The result implied that they accept themselves as infected or carriers of Coronavirus disease because of rendering their duties inside or outside the jail. They were also always socializing with their inmates, co-personnel, and other people. They cannot avoid being infected in Covid-19 virus because they were once being infected inside the jail or outside the jail during the pandemic. Due to the limited space inside the jail facility they are easily to be infected. They encountered that they had been infected with Covid-19, and as a result, they were placed in isolation or quarantine. They cope with the situation by strictly adhering to the isolation or quarantine procedures and minimum health protocols.

3.7. Adhering to health protocol

Health protocol is to prevent the spread of Coronavirus infection to the wider community (Pranita, Marpaung, Lubis & Ardana, 2021). Adhering to health protocols is the strategy to avoid illness and its transmission in the community (Oh, Lee, Schwarz, Ratcliffe, Markuns & Hirschhorn, 2020). When in public locations, always use a

face mask or face shield and keep a safe distance from other people (Zhai, 2020). These were revealed in the answers of the participants:

"As always, discipline always begins in ourselves. We will religiously observe minimum health protocols, and others will follow suit." (P1, 16-18).

"Always apply proper hygiene, take vitamins, and do physical activities to boost our immune system; Always be cautious about your health, practice proper good hygiene, and exercise daily to boost our immune system." (P2, 34-35; 42-43).

"During these covid-19, I'd want to emphasize the importance of adhering to health guidelines to avoid a contiguous case of covid-19." (P3, 73-75).

"By taking vitamins every and wearing facemask at all time; Always follow the health protocols." (P4,87;88).

"To prevent or avoid the spread of the Covid-19 by always wearing a facemask, face shield, and social distancing. In addition, I always maintain my good health by taking vitamins, proper exercise, and eating healthy foods." (P5, 102-105).

"I must wear a mask, face shield, alcohol, and other safety measures so that Covid-19 will be avoided, and also educate the PDL and mandate them to follow the health protocols to stop and prevent the Covid-19.

I will do some exercise, boost my immune system to maintain my good health and medical condition." (P6, 118-121).

"Follow health protocols and instructions. Take vitamins every day to have a strong immunity." (P7, 158-160).

"By observing the minimum health protocols and getting vaccinated. Proper hygiene, always follows minimum health protocols for preventing Covid-19, exercise yourself and eat healthy foods, drinks much water and take vitamins every day, avoid smoking and alcohol beverages." (P8, 187-190).

"We prevent or avoid the spreading of Covid-19 and other diseases inside the jail by sanitizing the area and always following health protocols. In addition, we maintain our good health state inside and even outside the jail by taking vitamins, eating healthy foods, and exercising." (P9, 220-223).

"Always perform the protocols in covid-19 to maintain a good health state inside and outside the jail; As jail officers, we maintain and obey the protocols of covid-19 to minimize the challenges. Always obey and follow the protocols in the jail." (P10, 246-247; 250-251).

The result implied that they closely follow health standards to prevent the spread of the Coronavirus both within the jail and in public settings. It was a challenge for them to monitor their inmates and coworkers to ensure that they followed the minimum health protocols and wore their facemask properly while maintaining social distance. To preserve their physical health, they take vitamins, consume good foods, and exercise to enhance their immunity, as well as refrain from unhealthy habits like drinking and smoking.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

Therefore, everyone is aware of the difficulties faced by jail officers in maintaining minimal health norms in the Philippines. This issues has a long-term impact on the institution and the inmates at the provincial jail. These

correctional guards have previous expertise with temperature monitoring, wearing facemask, and social separation. Despite the fact that the epidemic has produced significant changes within the jail, they have managed to adapt the situation. As a result, we can assure that they have followed the minimum health protocol.

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, it is highly recommended that the challenges encountered by the Jail officers in enforcing the minimum health protocols inside the provincial jail be known by other people. Through their experiences, more and more people will understand the protocols they implemented.

This study is highly applicable to all, whether inside or outside the jail because it has the same protocol. To prevent and minimize the spread of the Covid-19 virus, we must adhere to the protocols and guidelines. Our jail officers should understand and supported in their duties and responsibilities within the facility.

Declarations

Source of Funding

This research work did not receive any grant from funding agencies in the public or not-for-profit sectors.

Competing Interests Statement

The authors declare no competing financial, professional and personal interests.

Consent for publication

Authors declare that they consented for the publication of this research work.

Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed in data collection, research and paper drafting.

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